GORT WORKHOUSE.

RETURN to an Order of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 14 April 1851;—*for*,

COPIES "of the CORRESPONDENCE of the Poor-law Commissioners of *Ireland* with Captain *O'Brien*, late Temporary Poor-law Inspector, Mr. *Richard Bourke*, Poor-law Inspector, and the Honourable and Reverend *S. G. Osborne*, in reference to a Statement made hy the latter, in a work entitled 'Gleanings in the West of Ireland,' as to the PUNISHMENT OF WOMEN in the *Gort* Workhouse."

Poor-law Commission Office, Dublin, April 1851.

W. STANLEY, Secretary.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed*, 15 *April* 1851.

COPY LETTER from Captain *O'Brien*, late Temporary Poor-law Inspector, to the Commissioners; dated 2 January 1851.

(Gort Union.—No. 521/51.)

Assertion by Mr. S. G. Osborne, reflecting on inspectors, denied by Captain O'Brien, R. A.

A PASSAGE having appeared in Mr. Godolphin Osborne's recent work on the West of Ireland, which reflects generally on your inspectors who were employed there last summer, and seems to point more particularly to myself, I feel it my duty, in justice to my colleagues and to my own character, to bring the matter under your notice, with a view of recording my denial of the truth of Mr. Osborne's assertion therein contained. It is as follows:

"I told one official, I had just seen the women in one of his workhouses struck with sticks hy men; his reply was, 'I am glad of it, it is time something was done to keep order.'"

The "official" mentioned could he no other than an inspector, who is the only officer connected with several unions. The only instance in which Mr. Oshorne asserts that men struck women with sticks, is in the Gort workhouse, of which I was the inspector. I met Mr. Osborne immediately after he left that house. Moreover, I recollected having made some such ohservation (though certainly not in reply to what he has stated), and when I met Mr. Oshorne my greatest anxiety related to the discipline of the Gort workhouse.

Thinking it, under these circumstances, highly probable that Mr. Osborne referred to me, I applied to him to know if such was the case, and he has replied in the affirmative.

Now, I distinctly assert that the first time I ever heard of women heing struck with sticks, or by men in the Gort workhouse, was when I met with the statement (much to my surprise) in Mr. Osborne's hook, and I therefore meet Mr. Osborne's assertion, that I expressed my approval of women heing so treated, with a positive and unequivocal denial of its truth.

I have thought it necessary to make this statement, to avoid all misconception on the point, though I cannot helieve that much weight will he attached to the assertions of a writer who has not scrupled thus to avail himself of private conversation.

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COPY LETTER from the Honourable and Rev. *S. G. Osborne* to the Commissioners; dated 4 January 1851.

(Gort Union.—No. 1011/51.)

CAPTAIN O'BRIEN has forwarded to me a copy of a letter addressed to you on the subject of a statement made hy myself, as to his implied approval of women heing struck with sticks in the Gort Union workhouse.

He admits that he made some such observation as the one I quote; he denies, however, that he ever heard of the women being struck, &c. &c.

If he had sent you the whole of the correspondence which has passed between him, myself, and Mr. Short, you would see that Mr. Short corroborates the fact of the women being struck as I described; and also asserts that immediately upon my rejoining him, after my interview with Captain O'Brien, I remarked upon this very statement of Captain O'Brien's, as in answer to my statement of having seen "the women struck."

I most unequivocally assert that Captain O'Brien did make the remark exactly as I printed it, in answer to my statement above alluded to. He admits that his greatest anxiety, at the time, related to the discipline of the Gort workhouse. That he forgets to whom he made "some such observation" is unfortunate for him; I am fortunate enough to remember he made it to myself; under the circumstances of his great anxiety about discipline, and the state in which I found the Gort union workhouse, it strikes me as not at all an unnatural observation for him to have made.

As to having availed myself of a private conversation, I introduced myself to him simply because he was one of those gentlemen in office from whom I wished information on a public matter. I certainly now rejoice that as connected with Irish poor law matters his opinions will be those simply of a private individual.

COPY of the Commissioners' Reply; dated 9 January 1851.

(Gort Union.—No. 1011/51.)

THE Commissioners for administering the laws for relief of the poor in Ireland desire me to acknowledge your letter of the 4th instant, stating that you have received from Captain O'Brien a copy of a letter addressed by him to the Commissioners on the subject of a conversation which passed between yourself and Captain O'Brien, while acting as temporary inspector of Gort Union, in the month of June last.

In reply, I am directed to state that such a letter was received by the Commissioners from Captain O'Brien on the 4th instant, and that the Commissioners have caused your letter, and that of Captain O'Brien, to be placed on the official records of this department in the usual course.

COPY LETTER from the Commissioners to *Richard Bourke*, Esquire, Poor-law Inspector; dated 9 January 1851.

(No. 520/51.)

I AM directed by the Commissioners for administering the laws for relief of the poor in Ireland, in forwarding to you the accompanying papers, to observe, that it does not appear from the communications of Captain O'Brien, or from your report of the 19th ultimo, what the facts really were which led to Mr. Osborne's statements regarding the alleged practice of striking women with sticks in the Irish workhouses.

Captain O'Brien's letter to the Commissioners, while it denies all knowledge of the existence of the practice referred to before he read Mr. Osborne's statements,

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statements, rather implies that some foundation existed for those statements in reference to the Gort workhouse.

The Commissioners request, therefore, that you will take an early opportunity of making inquiry into the circumstances which led to the statement above referred to, and report thereon to the Commissioners at your earliest convenience.

Copy Report from Mr. *Richard Bourke*, Poor-law Inspector, to the Commissioners; dated 15 January 1851.

(Gort Union.—No. 2766/51.)

With reference to your letter of the 9th instant, alluding to the statement appearing in Mr. S. G. Osborne's book, to the effect that the women in the Irish workhouses were in the habit of being beaten with sticks by the male paupers, I beg to offer a few words in explanation of the remarks made by me on this subject, in my report of the 19th ultimo.

See Report of the 19th December, on extract from "Gleanings in the West of Ireland."

When first I read, in the extracts which you sent me, the remarks of Mr. Osborne on this subject, I felt so completely at a loss to know upon what authority he rested his statements, or to what unions he referred, that I sent for his book, which I took the trouble of reading from beginning to end. Finding, upon a careful perusal, that in his account of his visit to Gort Union was probably to be found the groundwork of the statement so sweepingly applied to all workhouses in the west of Ireland, and being myself quite unable to explain the incidents which Mr. Osborne stated that he observed (though finally persuaded, from my own experience, that in whatever way they occurred they must have been accidental), I wrote to Captain O'Brien, asking him whether he could give me any information on the subject. His reply has since been forwarded to you, and it shows that he was unable to afford any explanation, never having heard in any way of such a practice as that alluded to by Mr. Osborne, or of the circumstance alleged to have occurred at Gort, until he read them in that gentleman's book. I found it therefore impossible to deal with this statement in any other manner than appears in my report.

Upon receipt, however, of your letter of the 9th, being then at Loughrea, I returned through Gort on Monday the 13th, and examined upon oath the medical officer, the clerk, the matron, the assistant matron, and the wards-mistress, being the only remaining officers now in the employment of the union who were engaged in the main workhouse at the period of Mr. Osborne's visit, except the assistant master, who was in fever on the day Mr. Osborne was there. I beg now to enclose their depositions. I was anxious also to have examined two guardians who, at that time, were acting as a visiting committee, but as they were not present at the Board on the occasion of my visit, I could not do so; I have, however, written to each of them on the subject, and will forward their replies as soon as I receive them.

Very little comment is required from me respecting these depositions. They appear to me sufficiently explicit, and by no means confirmatory of Mr. Osborne's statements. The evidence of the matron seems to me especially worthy of attention. If Mr. Osborne saw what he alleges, and felt so much shocked at the sight, it does seem to me most remarkable that he should have refrained from calling the matron's attention to the matter, and not have done what lay in his power for the immediate protection of these poor women.

Martin Daly Nolan, Esq., M. D.; sworn.

I have been medical attendant of the Gort Union workhouse and hospitals since December 1841, when the house was opened. I remember the period of the visit of the Honourable and Reverend S. G. Osborne; it was about the 15th June, as well as I remember. I had great cause at that period to feel anxious as to the health of the inmates of the workhouse, as the pressure for relief was very great, and the numbers considerable. Upon this account I scarcely passed a single day, about this period, without visiting the workhouse, as well as

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as the hospitals, which, of course, I attended daily. I frequently attended at meal hours during this period, to examine the food, upon the quality of which I depended a good deal for the general health of the inmates. I never observed men using sticks either to the women or to any other classes; there used to be two men stationed at the doors leading into the hall from the kitchen passage, and they might have had short slender sticks in their hands, but I never saw them use them on any person. The inmates, on their way to breakfast or dinner, did not pass through these doors; they came in by side doors, and I do not remember men at either of those doors whilst the women were coming in; the women are generally brought in to dinner by an assistant matron or wardswoman, who stands at one of those doors to see that the women come in regularly, and the same is done by the men at the opposite door. Mr. O'Neill was master at that time; he died of fever shortly after this period.

I remember some boys having complained to me, about this period, of having been struck with a stick by the master, and, I think, one woman; and I immediately cautioned the master on the impropriety of such a course. I am quite certain that if the female inmates had been struck or beaten by any persons in the workhouse, they would immediately have complained to me. The inmates generally have always been in the habit of stating to me their grievances, of whatever kind, and I am persuaded that if any violence had been used to them I should have heard of it; I am confirmed in this by the fact of the people before mentioned having complained to me of the master; but these were the only instances of complaints of this nature I received, and I never heard of the women or other inmates having been beaten by paupers at meal times.

It may be well to state here that during this period the mortality was very favourable. As well as I remember, the number of inmates was then 3,645, and the mortality for the week in question was, I think, only nine.

(signed) *Martin D. Nolan*, M. D.,
Medical Officer, Gort Union Workhouse.

Sworn before me, at Gort, this 13th of January 1851.

Richard Bourke,
P. L. Inspector.

Mr. *James Slator*; sworn.

I have been clerk of the union since the workhouse was first opened. I remember the period of Mr. Sydney Osborne's visit; Mr. O'Neill was then master of the workhouse; I was present at various times in the house during the time Mr. O'Neill was master, as I was anxious to render him any assistance in my power, having been previously acquainted with him; I was occasionally in the dining-hall during this period at the hours of meals. I never remember having seen women struck by men with sticks; if I had seen anything of the kind I should have checked it at once and not have allowed it to be done; I am therefore quite sure that it never occurred in my presence. The meals were usually served by women. The great body of the female inmates entered the hall through the side door leading to their yard; the wardswoman was always in attendance, and usually stood at this side door. I never remember having seen men with sticks in their hands in the body of the hall nor at the door.

(signed) *James Slator*, Clerk.

Sworn before me, at Gort, this 13th day of January 1851.

Richard Bourke,
P. L. Inspector.

Barbara Bermingham; sworn.

I am matron of the Gort workhouse. I have held the office since the 20th of March 1850. I remember the occasion of Mr. Sydney Osborne's visit; it was on a Saturday; the women were at breakfast, and both the master, Mr. O'Neill, and I were in the hall at the time. I attended Mr. Oshorne and another gentleman twice up and down the hall, and Mr. Osborne tasted the cocoa,

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cocoa, and also examined the stirabout and tasted it. There never was any violence in the hall, as far as I saw, on that or any other occasion. Neither Mr. Osborne or his friend made any observations to me or in my hearing to the effect that men had been seen by them beating or striking any of the female inmates. At that period the assistant master was ill in fever; the master therefore could not leave the hall, and he asked me to accompany the visitors to the sheds, and to any other portions of the house they might wish to visit; but they only went to the sheds and the men's yard. I never saw pauper men with sticks in their hands in the hall when the women were at meals; there were none on the occasion in question; if there had been I could not have failed to have seen them.

There was one man usually placed at the door leading to the hall from the kitchen passage; I cannot say whether he had or had not a stick in his hand on that day. I have very rarely seen him with a stick, and he never goes up the hall. His name is Flanagan, and he has been in the house for some time.

The women never complained to me of having been struck by paupers. They did complain to me of having been struck by Mr. O'Neill, the then master. I have no doubt if they had been struck by others, they would have complained to me.

Whilst Mr. Osborne was in the workhouse a lad made his way to the master's office, thinking Mr. Osborne was an inspector or commissioner, and complained of having been struck by another pauper. He had been quarrelling and received a blow on the head, from which he was bleeding. I am quite convinced there was no other circumstance of violence brought under notice on that occasion. The meals are served by the kitchen girls, and never by men.

(signed) *Barbara Bermingham.*

Sworn before me, at Gort, this 13th of January 1851.

Richard Bourke,
P. L. Inspector.

Delia Purcell; sworn.

I am assistant matron of the Gort workhouse. I have been an officer of the union since March 1850, being originally appointed as wardswoman. At the time when Mr. O'Neill was master I was principally engaged in the bread store; but I was occasionally in the hall during meals. I do not remember ever having seen pauper men striking women with sticks. Sometimes when the women were unruly, I have known men sent for to take them to punishment in the confinement cell. But I am not aware of it ever being the habit to have pauper men in the hall during the women's meal times. There was a man at the door leading from the kitchen passage to the hall; but the great body of the women came in at the other door leading to their yard; only those from the probationary coming through this door. I never remember seeing that man strike women.

(signed) *Delia Purcell.*

Sworn before me, at Gort, this 13th January 1851.

R. Bourke,
Poor Law Inspector.

Mary O'Shaughnessy; sworn.

I am a wardswoman in the Gort workhouse. I entered on the duties about the 3d or 4th of June. I remember the time when Mr. O'Neill was master. I never saw pauper men with sticks in their hands, employed in the hall when the women were dining or breakfasting. There was a man at the door leading to the kitchen, and also at the two other doors. They used to help in placing the women in order at their meals. I never saw them strike them. They would not be allowed to strike them. They did not always carry sticks; but

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I have seen them with them; but I never saw them use them. I never heard of any complaint of the kind from a woman.

(signed) *Mary O'Shaughnessy.*

Sworn before me, at Gort, this 13th day of January 1851.

Richard Bourke,
Poor Law Inspector.

COPY LETTER from *Richard Bourke*, Esq. Poor-Law Inspector, to the Poor-Law Commissioners; dated 23 January 1851.

(Gort Union.—No. 4230/51.)

WITH reference to my letter of the 15th ultimo, on the subject of certain statements appearing in a book, entitled "Gleanings from the West of Ireland," as to the treatment of female inmates of the Gort workhouse, I now beg to transmit two letters I have received on the subject from the two guardians who, during the period of Mr. Osborne's visit, were acting on the visiting committee.

Enclosure referred to in foregoing.

(Copy.)

(No. 4230/51.)

Sir, Seamount House, Kinvarra, 20 January 1851.

I HAVE to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 14th instant, and beg to observe that I would have replied to it sooner, but that I had been in Dublin until the day before yesterday, and did not receive it until I arrived here.

I have, however, now to state in reply to your query, "as to whether I, as a member of the visiting committee of the Gort workhouse, for a portion of last summer, was aware of a practice, represented by the Honourable and Reverend G. Osborne to have then existed in that house, of male paupers having sticks in their hands, striking the female inmates in the dining hall during the hours of meals," that I never even heard of such a "practice;" and, let me add, that even an "occurrence" of such a nature much less a "practice" could not have taken place during the two months I acted on the visiting committee without my knowledge.

I undertook with other members of the Board (Mr. Mahon in particular) to discharge the duty of visiting the house, &c. in April last, and continued to act in that capacity for two months, as already stated; during that period we invariably examined everything connected with its internal management, always once a week, and frequently twice. My reports will show whatever irregularities we had from time to time there met with; and although we had frequently to complain of the inefficiency of the master of the workhouse, which complaints ultimately caused him to resign an office the duties of which he should never have undertaken to discharge, and by which, I regret to add, the poor man lost his life; I say, although we had to complain of the tardiness with which the master carried our orders into effect, there never was the slightest charge of cruelty or harsh treatment made by the inmates, male or female, against him or any of his assistants, paid or unpaid.

I should observe, that I was in the habit, particularly in the female department of the house, of asking them collectively and individually, if they had any complaints to make, and that the only complaints ever made were of insufficiency of food and want of clean linen and clothes.

On investigation, the first charge invariably fell to the ground, and I always remarked that that charge usually came from the best fed and the healthiest looking in the house.

With regard to the second complaint, viz., of the want of a change of linen and proper clothing, &c., I feel myself called upon to make a few explanatory observations, as I have been informed that the Honourable and Rev. Mr. Osborne animadverted in very strong language on the state he found the female paupers in the back sheds in, in reference to it; and I trust I will be able to show that the condition in which the reverend gentleman found these females on the occasion of his visit, gave as much concern, and caused as much anxiety to the members of the Board, as it would even to the Reverend Mr. Osborne himself, had he been a member of it, and that every means in our power, and within our reach, were adopted to remedy the evil complained of, and make the inmates of the Gort workhouse as comfortable as possible, and that as soon as possible.

Permit me to give a few extracts from my reports, and the orders of the Board in reference to them, in corroboration of what I have above stated.

"April 9th.—On the recommendation of visiting committee, orders were given to the master to commence whitewashing the body of the house and the dining-hall without delay,

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delay, and to put the able-bodied female paupers to work at spinning, &c., in place of the delicate-looking females then working.

"14th.—Drew the attention of the Board to the necessity of providing new clothes for the boys, and to our having found a great quantity of clothes in the laundry unwashed, for want of fire and water.

"Master called up; reproved by chairman for his neglect in procuring those necessaries for the laundry; ordered to attend to those things and the other recommendations of visiting committee.

"May 3d, 7th, 14th.—Drew the attention of the Board to the neglected state of the probationary female wards in back sheds, the necessity for a better organized system of cleaning and whitewashing the house in general, the sheds included; the want of a change of linen among the females and boys; the want of clothes in general and proper bedding for the daily-increasing admissions; and again to the neglect of the master in attending to our former orders, &c."

Thus it will be seen, that long before the Rev. Mr. Osborne visited the Gort workhouse, those things he thought proper to animadvert upon had engaged the attention, the serious attention, of the Board; but, it will be asked, what steps were taken to meet the difficulty and remedy the evil. I believe you yourself will bear me out in stating that every exertion was made that could be made under the peculiar circumstances we were labouring under.

Seeing that much of our embarrassments arose from the inefficiency of our master, he was called upon to resign, and he did resign. Our funds being exhausted, and finding it impossible to collect in the arrears of rates still due, and being fully aware of the inutility of imposing a new rate on a bankrupt union in the dead season of the year, and the Government advances being then limited to the current expenses for food, we appealed to the Commissioners; we earnestly entreated them to advance us a sum of money to purchase body and bed-clothes; those necessaries we required for the daily increasing influx of paupers into the house—at that time from two to three hundred weekly. The Commissioners generously responded to our call, and at the very time the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Osborne was holding us up to public odium, we had hundreds of hands at work to make the inmates of our workhouse comfortable and happy. Apologising for the length of this communication, and hoping that I have proved to the satisfaction of every candid and impartial mind that the Gort Board of Guardians, so far from deserving the imputations attempted to be cast on them by S. G. O. have discharged their duty as guardians of the poor with credit to themselves and advantage to that poor whose lives they have preserved by prompt attention to their wants.

I have, &c.
(signed) *D. J. Hynes*, M. D.

ENCLOSURE.

(Copy.)

(No. 4230/51.)

Northampton Lodge,
Kinvarra P. Office, 17 January 1851.

Sir,

I AM in receipt of your letter of the 14th instant, and beg to state that I have been one of the visiting committee all last summer, and up to the present time. I regularly visit the workhouse two or three times a week at different hours, and have never observed that the paupers were struck. I have frequently inquired of the inmates if they had any cause for complaint, and no such complaint was ever made, and if there existed such a practice it would have been reported to me, as they generally make known to me their grievances. Dr. Hynes, of Kinvarra, was in the habit of visiting with me.

I remain, &c.
(signed) *James Mahon*, P.L.G., Gort.

To R. Bourke, Esq.

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GORT WORKHOUSE.

COPIES of CORRESPONDENCE in reference to a Statement made by the Honourable and Reverend *S. G. Osborne*, in a Work entitled "Gleanings in the West of Ireland," as to the Punishment of Women in the Gort Workhouse.

(*Sir William Somerville*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed*,
15 *April* 1851

Under 1 *oz.*

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